

1.4 ORGANIZATION, CONTENT AND OBJECTIVES OF THIS ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

This EA is organized in a manner consistent with NEPA and DOE's NEPA implementation guidelines, including the specific guidelines for Site-Wide EAs. The EA has eight sections. The first section is an Executive Summary. The organization, content and objectives of the EA's remaining chapters are as follows:

Chapter 1 Introduction presents the purpose and need for the program, describes the site, characterizes the purposes and objectives of a Site-Wide EA, summarizes the organization, content and objectives of this EA, sets forth future NEPA documentation protocol and checklists, and summarizes the scoping process and results.

Chapter 2 Proposed Action and Alternatives presents a detailed description of the short-term and long-term program of improvement on the site and describes the No Action Alternative.

Chapter 3 Affected Environment describes environmental baseline information about the site and surrounding area.

Chapter 4 Environmental Consequences and Mitigation Measures describes potential impacts of the Proposed Action and No Action alternatives, compares the impacts, presents required and recommended measures to reduce impacts, and makes "significance" findings.

Chapter 5 Comments on the Draft EA and Responses represents letters received by NREL after the Draft EA was circulated for public review, along with specific responses to each letter. This Final EA includes revisions to the Draft EA text that were necessary as a result of certain comments and responses.

Chapter 6 List of Preparers identifies the individuals who prepared the EA and their roles.

Chapter 7 Bibliography and References presents a listing of key documents and consultations that took place as part of the EA process.

1.5 SCOPING PROCESS AND RESULTS

A scoping letter was prepared and distributed to an extensive list of agencies, organizations and members of the public. This list included a comprehensive group of parties who have expressed interest in the site and site circumstances. Appendix C presents the scoping letter, a complete list of the scoping letter recipients, and a complete list of response letters that were received during the 30-day scoping period. The following discussions summarize the relevant input received during the scoping period that ended on July 18, 2001 and corresponding modifications to the Proposed Action.

1.5.1 Environmental Issues

The scoping letter for the Proposed Action identified the following environmental topics to be addressed in the EA:

Land Use, Planning, Socioeconomics and Public Policy
Traffic and Circulation

Air Quality and Noise
Visual Quality/Aesthetics
Water Resources
Soils and Geology
Biological Resources
Cultural Resources
Waste Management
Public Facilities, Services and Utilities
Energy

The following specific issues were raised during the scoping process and are addressed in this EA:

- Wildfire: current and future values at risk, protection efforts, mitigation of risk, and vegetative fuels;
- The presence of on-site and off-site endangered species, especially Preble's populations, habitat and related protections;
- The presence of tallgrass prairie and related protections;
- Conservation management planning: purpose, focus and responsibilities;
- Gas line alignments and related impacts on conservation management areas;
- Bird strikes from turbine blades;
- Wind monitoring data for emergency response teams;
- Site access and safety at the Highway 128/site access road intersection;
- Visual access for the public from viewing areas; and
- Aircraft safety caused by potential interference with Jefferson County Airport height restrictions and navigational and communication equipment;
- Status of the site relative to the CERCLA and the National Priority List, and;
- Potential conflicts of the Proposed Action relative to mineral leases and associated agreements.

1.5.2 Alternatives

The following alternatives were defined prior to the scoping period and were mentioned in the scoping letter:

- New Site Alternative;
- Off-Site Improvements Alternative;
- Site Development Configuration Alternatives;
- Reduced Development Intensity Alternative; and
- No Action Alternative.

No additional alternatives were raised during the scoping period.

At this time, the No Action Alternative is the only alternative addressed in the EA. The No Action Alternative would leave the site in its current configuration, add no new facilities or infrastructure, and maintain current levels of research, operation, and management.

Other alternatives raised prior to and during the scoping period were considered, but were eliminated from further analysis. The rationales for eliminating these alternatives is summarized as follows:

- New Site and Off-Site Improvements Alternative: not considered feasible because of the technical and cost implications associated with decentralized operations and site/infrastructure complications.
- Other Site Development Configuration Alternatives: not considered feasible because of the interrelated nature of the proposed facilities, site development constraints, and the inherent flexibility of the Proposed Action with respect to future facility footprints.
- Reduced Development Intensity Alternative: not considered feasible because it is inconsistent with the Proposed Action's purpose and need and the intent of preparing this Site-Wide EA.

1.5.3 Modifications Between Release of the Scoping Letter and Release of the Draft and Final EAs

The scoping letter identified the designation of a Conservation Management Area on the western side of the site as part of the Proposed Action. Historically, NREL has managed that area and several others (shown on Figure 2-1) as no-build zones with an emphasis on conservation management. As clarification, the Proposed Action actually includes ongoing management of the Conservation Management Areas rather than designation of those areas.

Since release of the Draft EA, NREL received five letters commenting on the Draft EA. Some of the comments in these letters and NREL's responses required revisions to the text of the Draft EA. Section 5 of this document presents those letters and NREL's responses. None of these changes alter the significance of the findings of the Draft EA.

In addition, other changes have been made within the document to improve clarity and accuracy. None of these changes alter the significance of the findings of the Draft EA.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK